

Varanasi Yatra



Lord Sri Bindu Madhav

PS: This article is also available on website [Varanasi Yatra](#)

Varanasi, also popularly known as Kashi and Benares, is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. Varanasi has a documented history tracing 4500 years back. Varanasi was founded by Lord Siva and the entire city rests on his trident. Situated in the vast Gangetic plains of India, it is amongst the seven most sacred cities (*sapta-puri*). It draws millions of pilgrims from all over the world. In the *Rig Veda*, the city was referred to as Kasi or Kashi, which means 'the luminous one'. *Srimad-Bhagavatam Canto 10, chapter 66* describes how Lord Krishna went to Kasi and killed Paundraka and Kasiraja, and how the Lord's Sudarsana disc defeated a demon, incinerated the city of Kasi and killed Sudaksina.

Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu came to Varanasi while going to and returning from Vrindavana to Puri, as described in *Sri Caitanya Caritamrta*. While staying in Varanasi for two months on His way back from Vrindavana, Lord Caitanya became the guest of Chandrasekhar Vaidya and Tapana Misra. He stayed at the house of Chandrasekhar and honoured prasadam at the home of Tapana. Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami, who is one of the *Six Goswamis of Vrindavana*, was the son of Tapana Misra. It was here that Lord Caitanya met Sri Sanatana Gosvami, after

Sanatana had escaped from Nawab's prison at Ramkeli (Bengal). By the arrangement of a Maharashtrian *brahmana*, who was a great devotee of Lord Caitanya, the Lord was invited to a philosophical discourse by Prakasananda Sarasvati, a great giant scholar and sannyasi of the Mayavadi or Sankara sampradaya and discussion was made on the Vedanta philosophy.

After the discussion, Prakasananda immediately fell at the lotus feet of Lord Caitanya and regretted his past behaviour towards the Lord. Prakasananda, along with his 60,000 followers, took up the process of pure devotion to Lord Sri Krishna. Thus, Lord Caitanya established the easy method of *Sankirtana* movement as the most suitable method for the deliverance of the people in this age of Kali-yuga. Thereafter, Lord Caitanya performed the amazing pastime of tumultuous chanting of Hare Krishna kirtans in front of the famous Sri Bindu Madhav at *Pancanada ghat*. *Sri Caitanya Caritamrta* Adi-lila chapter 7, verses 40 to 161 and Madhya-lila chapter 25 describe in detail how all the residents of Varanasi were converted to Vaisnavism.

In particular, *Caitanya Caritamrta* Madhya-lila chapter 25, verses 165 to 167 describe: "*All the inhabitants of Kasī [Varanasi] began chanting the Hare Krishna maha-mantra in ecstatic love. Sometimes they laughed, sometimes they cried, sometimes they chanted, and sometimes they danced. All the Mayavadi sannyasīs and learned scholars at Varanasi began discussing Srimad-Bhagavatam. In this way, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu delivered them. Thus, He turned the whole city of Varanasi into another Navadvīpa [Nadiya-nagara].*"

Revered Sri Bindu Madhav Temple is situated on the banks of *Pancanada ghat*. This temple hosts the most merciful and charismatic deity of Lord Sri Bindu Madhav. When Lord Caitanya was in Varanasi, He chanted and danced before Sri Bindu Madhav performing *Harinama Sankirtana*. At that time, Sri Bindu Madhav temple was majestic with unique architecture. Unfortunately, being envious of seeing the astounding glories of Lord Bindu Madhav, the tyrant Aurangzeb ordered a decree to demolish the temple and built a mosque here in 1673 AD. Sri Bindu Madhav is now worshiped in a temple beside the mosque. However, by the desire and mercy of the Vaishnava Acaryas, Lord Sri Bindu Madhav's glories have now spread all over the world!

In *Sri Caitanya Caritamrta* Madhya-lila, chapter 17 verse 86 purport, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada explains,

Bindu Madhava temple is the oldest Visnu temple in Varanasi. It is situated on the banks of the Ganges. Formerly, five rivers converged there, and they were named Dhutapapa, Kirana, Sarasvati, Ganga and Yamuna. Now only the river Ganges is visible. The old temple of Bindu Madhava, which was visited by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, was later dismantled by Aurangzeb, the great Hindu-hating emperor of the Mogul dynasty. In the place of this temple, he constructed a big mosque. Later, another temple was constructed by the side of the mosque, and this temple is still existing. In the temple of Bindu Madhava there are the Deities of four-handed Narayana and the goddess Laksmi. In front of these deities is a column of Sri Garuda, and along the side are the deities of Lord Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Sri Hanumanji. In the province of Maharashtra, there is a state known as Satara. During the time of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, the native prince belonged to the Vaishnava cult. Being a brahmana, he took charge of worshiping the Deity.

As per *Kashi-khanda*, to fulfil the desire of Lord Siva, Lord Visnu came from Mandarachal to Kashi with the mission of making King Divodasa leave Kashi. After accomplishing His mission, Lord Visnu was enjoying the serene beauty of Kashi at *Pancanada ghat*. He came across a lean looking sage, Agni Bindu, who was undergoing austerity (*tapasa*) there. Lord approached Agni Bindu. On seeing the Lord personally appearing, the sage was ecstatic and offered his prostrate obeisances. Singing the praises, the sage addressed the Lord by various names, like Mukunda, Madusudana, Madhava, Narayana, Rama, Janardhana etc. He also mentioned that those who worship the Supreme Lord with Tulasi leaves attract His blessings.

Lord Visnu was very pleased and asked the sage to seek any divine boon. Agni Bindu sought only one thing, that Lord Visnu should always appear for his worship in the vicinity of Pancanada ghat. Lord Visnu granted it accordingly. Lord stated that Kashi is a *Punya-ksetra*. He will stay in Kashi as long as Kashi is present and there will be no destruction of this holy city as it is situated atop the Trident of Lord Siva. Therefore, even Maha Pralaya (great deluge) cannot destroy the city. Agni Bindu was extremely happy. He sought that Lord Visnu should not just appear here but also appear with a name connected to him. Lord Visnu agreed to the request of the sage. Lord stated that henceforth He would be known as Bindu Madhav. In His presence, the Pancanada ghat will be extremely sacred. Lord Visnu further stated that He was called Aadi Madhav in *Satya-yuga*, Ananda Madhav in *Treta-yuga*, Shree Madhav in *Dvapara-yuga*. In *Kali-yuga*, the Lord will be known by the name of Bindu Madhav.

Utsava Murti of Lord Bindu Madhav was found in the holy Ganges at Varanasi by HH Madhavendra Thirtha Swami in the 17th century while he was having a bath at this ghat. During that period, the main deity of Sri Bindu Madhav was transferred to the Moola Mutt of Kashi Mutt for protection from the invaders. However, the *Utsava murti* was missing for a long time. Swamiji lovingly reinstalled this *utsava murti*. Pancanada ghat is one of the five main ghats in Varanasi.

Tapana Misra's house and the resting place of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu are near Bindu Madhav Temple. The exact location is Jatanbar, Dudh Katra, Bisweshwarganj, Varanasi. Lord Caitanya's resting place is in an open area on a road junction. Here one can have the darshans of beautiful paintings of Lord Caitanya's pastimes. Tapana Misra's house is close-by. Unfortunately, there is no signage posted in front of his house as it is now inside private property. To recognize this place, there is a blue coloured front door at the main entrance. One can inquire from the nearby shops about the exact location. Everyone can come and have darshans of the deities at Tapana Mishra's house.

Lord Caitanya discussed the deeper topics of Krishna consciousness with Sanatana Gosvami at the famous Dasashwamedh Ghat in Varanasi as described in *Sri Caitanya Caritamrta Madhya-lila chapter 20*.

Important note: *There are two ways to reach Sri Bindu Madhava temple – (1) by taking a boat ride from any of the ghats in Varanasi to reach Pancanada ghat, or (2) by going on a motorbike, bicycle or walking to the temple through the inner city. Devotees can approach this place by travelling to Bhaironath in a rickshaw and then walking on foot to this temple. As Varanasi is an anciently inhabited city, the lanes in the inner part of the city are narrow. To reach Bindu Madhav temple, one has to pass through several intertwining narrow lanes. In contrast, the boat ride on the Ganges River is pleasant and takes one directly to Pancanada ghat where Bindu Madhav temple is located.*

Shri Kashi Vishwanath is the famous Temple in Varanasi. It is one of the 12 Jyotirlingas. The main temple shrine is small and has a golden flag atop. Recently, a magnificent state-of-the-art corridor was constructed at the Temple that leads directly to the Ganges River, which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi. The entire temple area is marvellously developed with immaculate marble flooring, structures, libraries and auditoriums to conduct Vedic conferences. Indeed, it is worth visiting and a must-see place. This temple has been destroyed and re-constructed a number of times in history. The last structure was demolished by Aurangzeb, who constructed the Gyanvapi Mosque on its site. The current structure was built on an adjacent site by the Maratha monarch, Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore, in 1780.

International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) has a temple in Varanasi. Their Lordships Sri Sri Radha Gopal Ji are the presiding deities. The temple is close to the main city area. Currently, a new temple is being constructed on the same premises. ISKCON devotees actively participate in the Krishna Conscious preaching programs at the nearby Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Banaras Hindu University is the most prestigious and respected university in

India. Many ISKCON sannyasis and senior devotees regularly dedicate their time and efforts to conduct seminars and Youth preaching programs at BHU to uplift society to take up the eternal, all-beneficial process of Krishna Consciousness. The outcomes have been very positive.

Varanasi is situated at the confluence of rivers Varuna and Asi (hence *Varun-asi* or Varanasi), which form the mainstream of the mighty Ganges River. Ganges, which normally flows southeast, reverses its course and flows north for a while at Varanasi. Ganges ghats (river front) are the most popular pilgrimage spot of Varanasi. The spectacular 5 km sweep of the ghats is a unique sight, best viewed at dawn, except during the winter months when the area is covered with fog. Varanasi has at least 84 ghats, most of which are used for bathing by pilgrims and spiritually significant puja ceremonies, while a few are used exclusively as Vedic cremation sites.

The extensive stretches of ghats in Varanasi enhance the riverfront with a multitude of shrines, temples, and palaces built "tier on tier above the water's edge". There is a great tradition of Yatras in the holy city of Kashi and the most sacred path is that of Panchkoshi Parikrama, a fifty-mile path with a radius of five miles that covers 108 shrines along the way, with Panchakoshi temple as its main shrine. Every evening at sunset, spectacular Arati ceremonies are performed in various ghats of Varanasi, which is worthwhile to attend. Many pilgrims take part in the Arati ceremonies by getting on boats that take them to different ghats.

There are references to Kashi in *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas. Several great personalities, including Lord Nityananda, Sripad Ramanujacarya, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Guru Nanak, Sankaracharya and others have visited Varanasi.

Lord Buddha came to Sarnath. It is 13 km from Varanasi. After attaining enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, Buddha came here. He delivered his first sermon in Sarnath and set in motion the wheel of law. Sarnath has many exquisitely beautiful gardens and Stupas (pagoda). Buddhism spread throughout India and other parts of the world when Emperor Ashoka came into power. Here, in Sarnath, the king established a marvellous image of four lions facing four directions joined together with the wheel of dharma. This statue became the national symbol of India.

Varanasi has been the hub of art, culture, spirituality, and music for several centuries. Several unique and rare festivals are held at Varanasi, including (1) Lord Krishna's Kaliya Nag Nathaiya Lila (subduing of Kaliya serpent) at Tulsi Ghat is held in Nov-Dec. (2) Bharata Milap Festival at Nali Imli, celebrating Lord Rama's return to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile and His reunion with His brother Bharata is held the day following Dussehra. (3) Nakkataiya Mela at Chet Gang, the pastime from Ramayana in which Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana, comes to entice Rama and then Lakshmana is held in mid-Oct. (4) Ganga Mahotsav in Prabodhini Ekadasi to Kartik Purnima in the month of Oct-Nov. (5) Dev Deepawali on Kartik Purnima is celebrated to commemorate Lord Siva's victory over the demon Tripurasura. It is also known as Tripurotsav or Tripura Purnima. Dev Deepawali is of special significance to the city of Varanasi as the banks of the river Ganges are illuminated with millions of diyas to mark the festival. The entire sight is stunning! Many foreign tourists come to Varanasi especially to attend these festivals. This presents a wonderful opportunity to introduce and preach Krishna Consciousness to foreign and local masses.

Varanasi is well connected by direct flights from Delhi, Kolkata and other parts of India. Varanasi is also well connected by rail and road to the rest of India.

Places to visit in and around Varanasi:

1. Sri Bindu Madhav Temple
2. Lord Caitanya's resting place
3. Tapan Misra's house

4. Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple
5. Ganges River front ghats
6. ISKCON Varanasi
7. ISKCON Preaching Centre at BHU (Banaras Hindu University)
8. Sri Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple
9. Sarnath

1. Sri Bindu Madhav Temple

Sri Bindu Madhav Temple is situated on the banks of *Pancanada* ghat. It is one of the five main ghats in Varanasi. Beneath this ghat, the Ganges, Yamuna, Sarasvati, Kirana and Dhutapapa rivers meet. This temple hosts the most merciful and charismatic deity of Lord Sri Bindu Madhav. When Lord Caitanya was in Varanasi, He chanted and danced before Sri Bindu Madhav performing *Harinama Sankirtana*.

Outside the main entrance there are murti's of Garuda, the carrier of Lord Visnu and Hanuman Ji, the eternal servitor of Lord Ramacandra. Inside the temple, there is a hallway and at the far end is the charismatic Lord Sri Bindu Madhav. One can get close to the altar to have the darshan and also speak to the pujari. On the side wall there is a murti of the sage Shri Agni Bindu. Darshan timings are *4:30AM to 1PM and 4PM to 8:30PM*. The pastime of how Lord Bindu Madhav manifested to fulfil the desire of His great devotee Agni Bindu and the directions to reach this temple are described above.



Way to Sri Bindu Madhav Temple



Entrance of Sri Bindu Madhav Temple



Main altar of Lord Sri Bindu Madhav



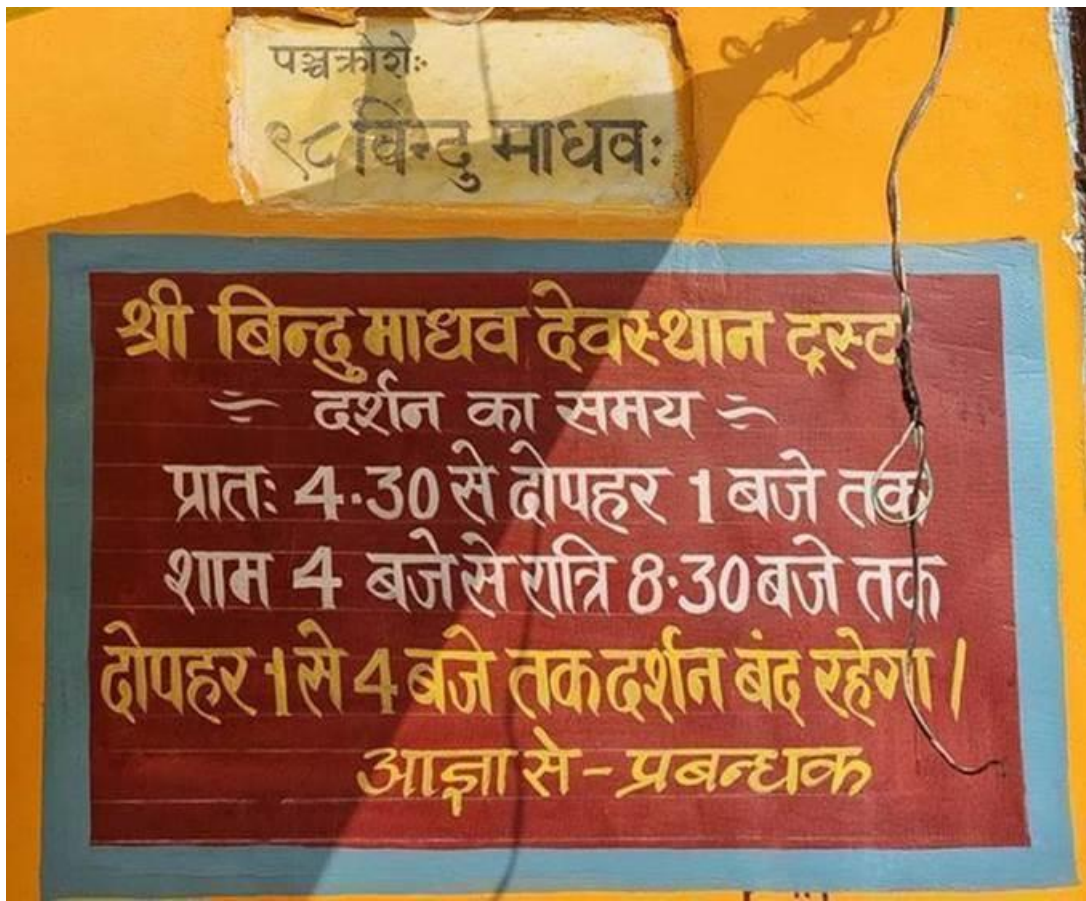
Lord Sri Bindu Madhav



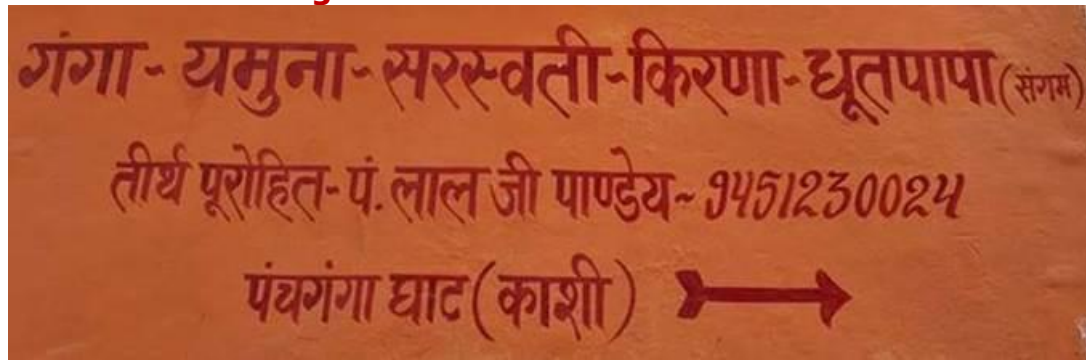
Lord Sri Bindu Madhav



Lord Sri Bindu Madhav



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Pancanada ghat

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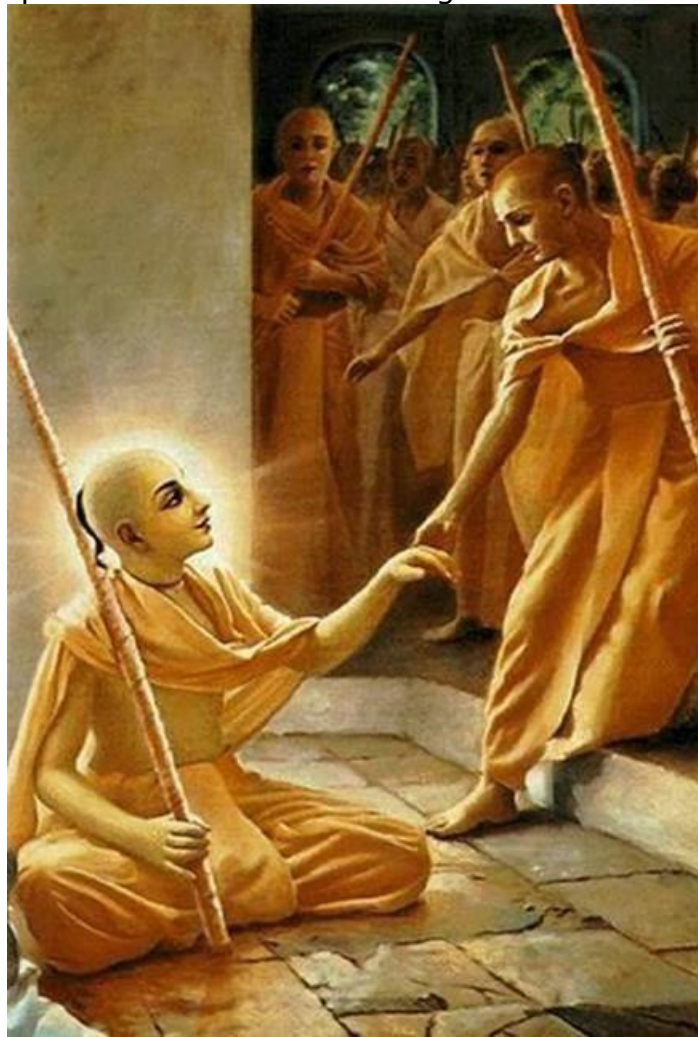


Pancanada ghat



Pancanada ghat

It is especially auspicious to bathe here during the month of Karttika (Oct-Nov).



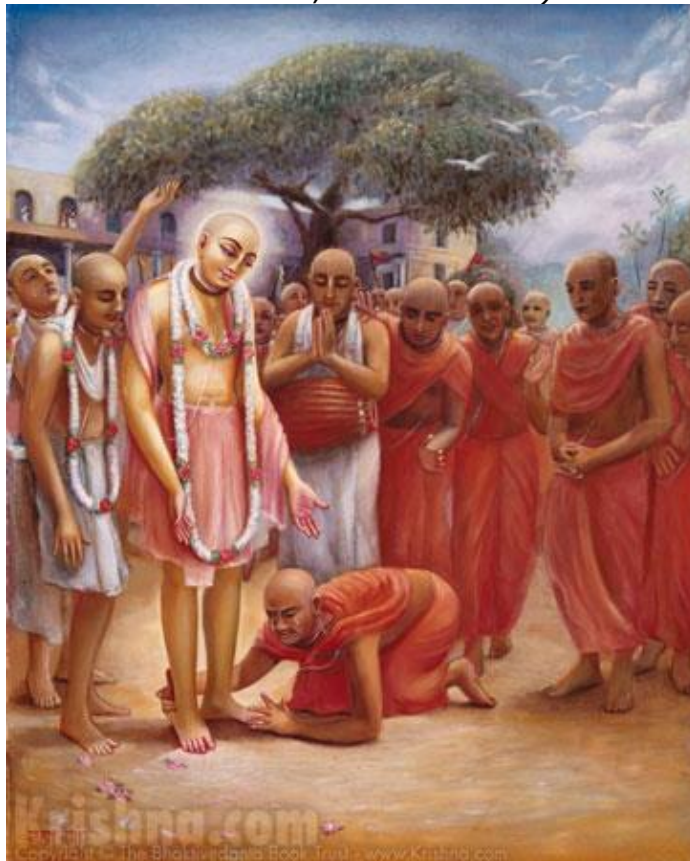
Lord Caitanya Greeted By Prakashananda Sarasvati

When the Mayavadi sannyasis saw Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and the brilliant effulgence of His body, they immediately stood up in respect. Their leader, Prakashananda Sarasvati, addressing Lord Caitanya as His Holiness, asked Him why He was sitting in an unclean place. He caught Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu by the hand and personally seated Him in the midst of the assembly. (*Caitanya-Caritamrta, Adi-lila, 7.61-65*)



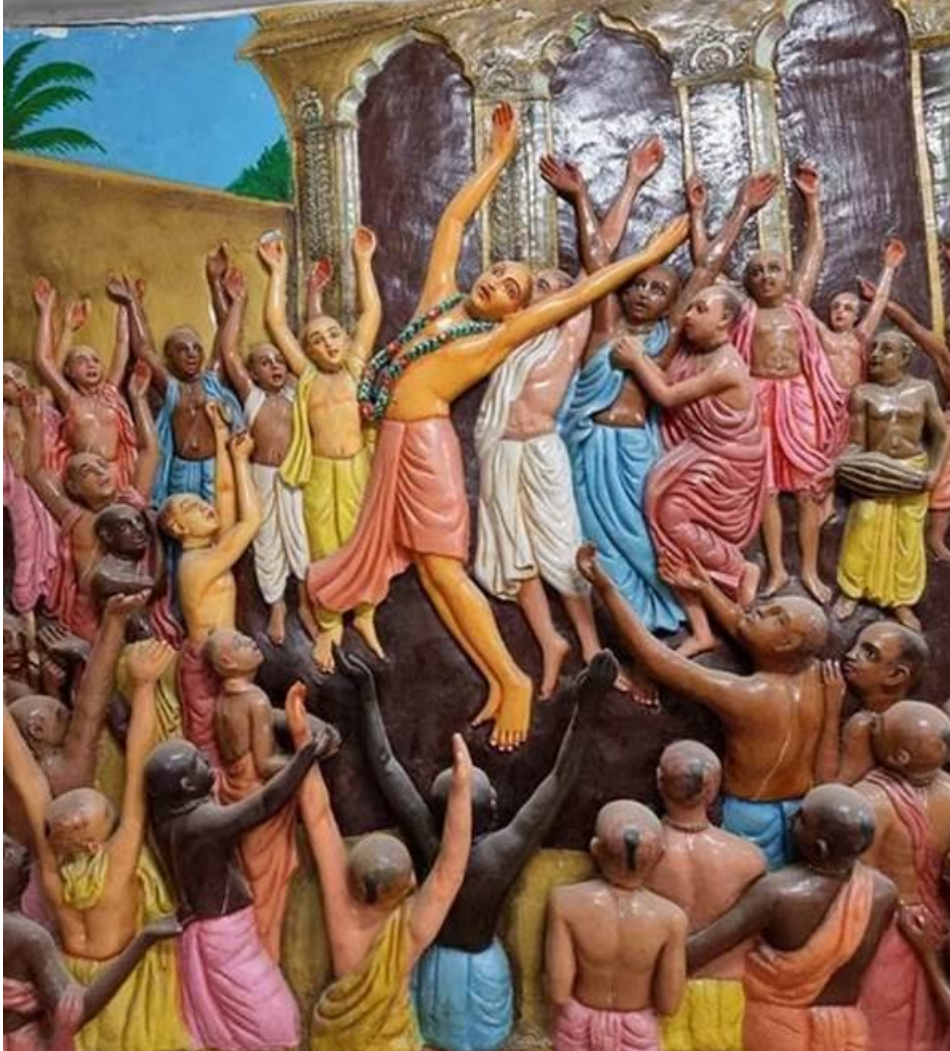
Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Mayavadi Sannyasis

From that moment when the Mayavadi sannyasis heard the explanation of Vedanta-sutra [essence of knowledge of the Vedas] from the Lord, their minds changed, and on the instruction of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, they too chanted, "Krishna! Krishna!" always. (*Caitanya-Caritamrta, Adi-lila 7.149*)



Prakashananda Sarasvati Repents His Behaviour

All the people of Benares were astonished to see Lord Caitanya's ecstatic symptoms. When the Lord regained external consciousness, He saw that there were many Mayavadi sannyasis and other people gathered around, and He stopped the kirtan. He offered humble prayers to Prakashananda Sarasvati [a Mayavadi sannyasi]. Prakashananda caught hold of the Lord's feet, but Lord Caitanya glorified him as most worshipable. Prakashananda replied, "Formerly I have committed many offenses against You by blaspheming You, but now the effects of my offenses are counteracted by my touching Your lotus feet." Prakashananda repented his offenses and recognized Lord Caitanya as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. (*Caitanya-Caritamṛta, Madhya-līla 25.69-81*)



Prakashananda Sarasvati and His Disciples See Caitanya Dancing Ecstatically

When Caitanya Mahaprabhu reached the temple of Bindu Madhava, He was so overwhelmed by the beauty of Lord Bindu Madhava, that He began dancing ecstatically in the courtyard of the temple. The four devotees accompanying Him began to chant along with Him, and soon hundreds and thousands of people were chanting, creating a tumultuous, auspicious sound. When Prakashananda Sarasvati and his disciples heard the sound, they came to see the Lord, and they also joined the chanting. (*Caitanya-Caritamṛta, Madhya-līla 25.62-67*)

2. Lord Caitanya's Resting Place

Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu's resting place is near Sri Bindu Madhav Temple. The exact location is Jatanbar, Dudh Katra, Bisweshwarganj, Varanasi. The resting place is in an open area on a road junction. Here one can have the darshans of rare and beautiful paintings of Lord Caitanya's pastimes. Also, there is an ancient well on the side near the steps.

Sri Caitanya Caritamṛta Madhya-līla, chapter 17, verse 89 describes, while at Varanasi, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu stayed at the house of Tapana Misra. Near Tapana Misra's house was a bathing ghat known as Pancanadi-ghata. Caitanya Mahaprabhu used to take His bath daily at this ghat, and He used to see the temple of Bindu Madhava. Then He would take His lunch at Tapana Misra's house. Near the Bindu Mādhava temple is a big banyan tree, and it is said that

after eating, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu used to rest beneath the tree. That banyan tree is still known today as Caitanya-vata. Gradually, due to changes in language, the name became Yatana-vata. The local people still call that place Yatana-vata.

At present, beside a lane there is a tomb of Vallabhacarya, but there is no sign that Caitanya Mahaprabhu ever lived there. Vallabhacarya was also known as Mahaprabhu among his disciples. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu probably lived at Yatana-vata, but there is no sign of Candrasekhara's or Tapana Misra's house, nor is there any sign of the Mayavadi sannyasi Prakasananda Sarasvati, with whom Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu discussed the Vedanta-sutra. A little distance from Yatana-vata is a temple of Gaura-Nityananda established by Sasibhusana Niyogi Mahasaya of Calcutta. During the time of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, this temple was managed by the mother-in-law of Sasibhusana and his brother-in-law Narayana-candra Ghosa.



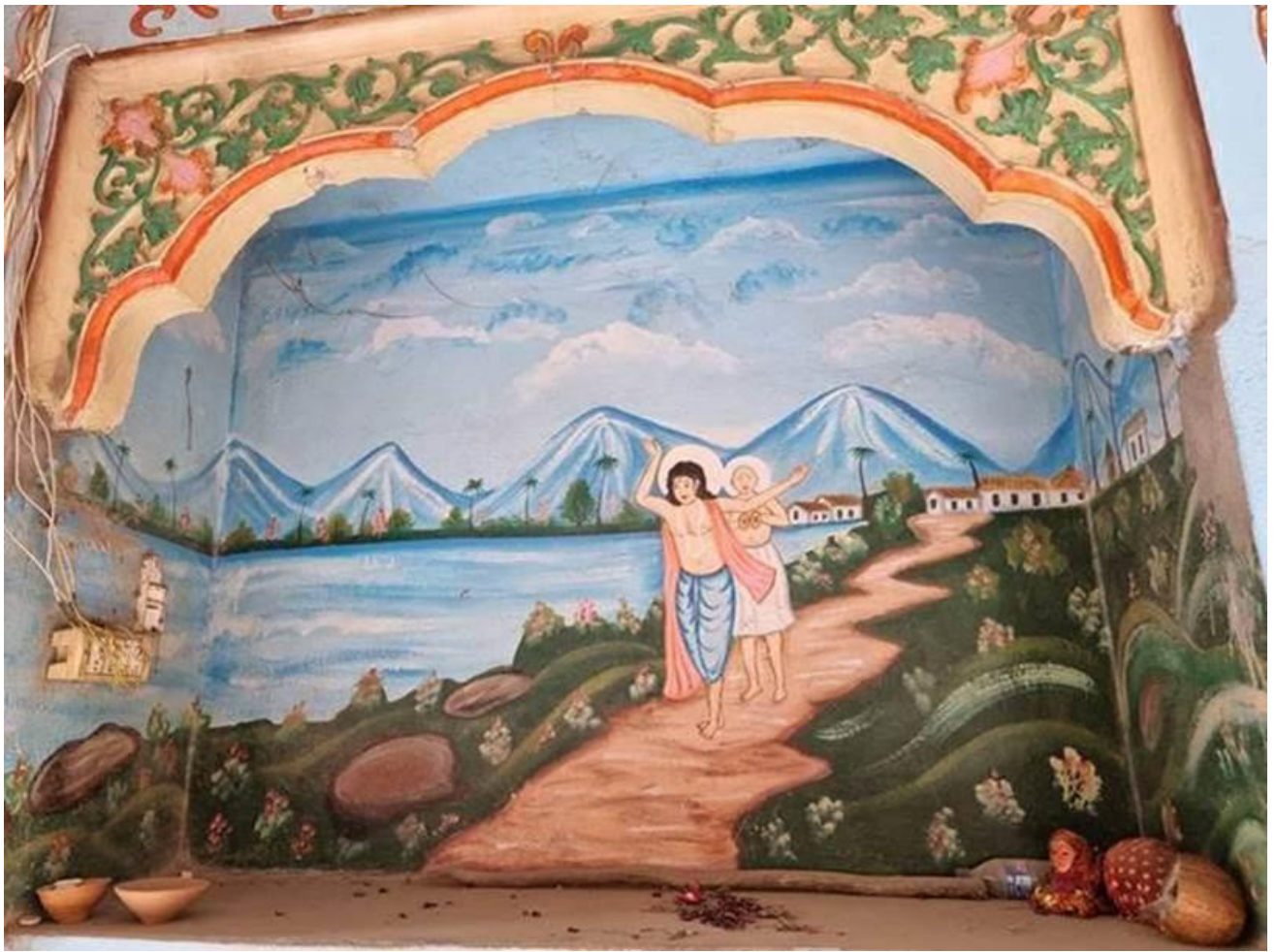
Resting place of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu in Varanasi



Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu



Prakashananda Sarasvati and His Disciples



Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Tapana Misra



Lord Caitanya and Prakashananda Sarasvati dancing during the Hare Krishna kirtana



Paintings at Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu's resting place

3. Tapana Misra's House

Tapana Misra's house is close-by. Unfortunately, there is no signage posted in front of his house as it is now inside private property. To recognize this place, there is a blue coloured front door at the main entrance. One can inquire from the nearby shops about the exact location. Everyone can come and have darshans of the deities at Tapana Mishra's house. While staying in Varanasi for two months on His way back from Vrindavana, Sri Caitanya became the guest of Chandrasekhar Vaidya and Tapana Misra. He stayed at the house of Chandrasekhar and honoured prasadam at the home of Tapana Misra. Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami was the son of Tapana Misra.

Tapana Misra: While Lord Caitanya was living as a student in Navadvipa-dhama in Bengal, He went on a pilgrimage to Bangladesh or East Bengal. There He was demonstrating such inconceivable scholarship in teaching Sanskrit grammar that He was getting hundreds and thousands of people as students. Just when He was about to leave, a very sincere seeker of the truth, by the name Tapana Misra, approached Him.

For years and years, Tapana Misra was searching through various religious scriptures and philosophical doctrines for the highest goal of life and the way to attain it. He was dissatisfied with all material pursuits and mundane education. Unless he understood what the goal of life was, he considered his life a useless waste. He was so sincere and prayed to the Lord with such deep intensity that one evening the Lord Caitanya appeared before him in a dream and told him, "I have incarnated in this world and I am waiting for you." The Lord told Tapana Misra where to meet Him. So Tapana Misra came to the place where Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu was sitting with His students and fell at the lotus feet of the Lord. Tapana said to the Lord, "Unless I understand the goal of life, there will be no meaning, no purpose and no satisfaction in my life. Please instruct me."

Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, in a simple but clear manner, told him that the goal of life is to love Krishna and to serve Krishna with body, mind, words and soul. The means of developing that we in this age is to chant His holy names. Then Caitanya Mahaprabhu specifically and directly told him, "You chant this sixteen word mantra that is given in the *Kali Santarana Upanisad*. It is the Mahamantra and is the greatest and most powerful of all mantras:

*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare
Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*

Then Caitanya Mahaprabhu gave him a very mysterious instruction. He told him, "You go and live in Varanasi." In those days there were only impersonal philosophers in Varanasi. But Tapana Misra accepted that strange order as his life and soul and moved to Varanasi. Caitanya Mahaprabhu told him, "I will come to Varanasi in the near future and at that time I will explain in more detail about the chanting of Harinama and the goal of life." So Tapana Misra moved to Varanasi.

There was another Vaishnava who was living there at that time. His name was Chandrasekhar Vaidya. Lord Caitanya visited Sri Vrindavana-dham after accepting *sannyasa*, and on His return journey He stayed in Varanasi for two months. During that time, He stayed at the house of Chandrasekhar and honoured prasadam at the home of Tapana Misra. By that time, Tapana Misra had a young son whose name was Raghunath Bhattacharya. This young boy was very attached to Lord Caitanya. How much love he had for Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and how attentive he was to hearing every word spoken by the Lord! He would take great pleasure in massaging the legs of the Lord after the Lord had danced for hours and hours a day while chanting the kirtan of the holy name. He would accept the most menial and humble services. Although Raghunath Bhatta was very learned and a *brahmana*, he would take great pleasure in washing the dishes of Caitanya Mahaprabhu and doing simple, little services. Through this, he became very intimately favoured by the Lord.

Later, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu returned to Jagannatha Puri, His residence. Soon after this, Raghunath Bhatta Gosvami decided, while he was a young man, that he was going to give up everything of the world and simply surrender his life to Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and be His servant. So, with the blessings of his family members, he left Varanasi and began the long walk to Sri Purushottam Ksetra, Jagannatha Puri-dham.

[Reference: Vrindavan Yatra Volume 1 book by HH Radhanath Swami Maharaj]



Entrance of Tapana Misra's house



Tapana Misra's house

4. Shri Kashi Viswanath Temple

Shri Kashi Vishwanath is the famous Temple in Varanasi. It is one of the 12 Jyotirlingas. Recently, a magnificent state-of-the-art corridor was constructed at the Temple that leads directly to the Ganges River, which was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi on 13 December 2021. The entire temple area is marvellously developed with immaculate marble flooring, structures, libraries and auditoriums to conduct Vedic conferences. Indeed, this is worth visiting. This temple has been destroyed and re-constructed a number of times in history. The current structure was built on an adjacent site by the Maratha monarch, Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore, in 1780.



Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple



Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple

This temple is also called the Golden Temple of Kashi



Shri Kashi Vishwanath



Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple



Spectacular Kashi Vishwanath corridor that connects to Ganges river



View of grand Kashi Vishwanath corridor from the Ganges River

5. Ganges River Front Ghats

Ganges ghats (river front) are the most popular pilgrimage spot in Varanasi. The spectacular 5 km sweep of the ghats is a unique sight, best viewed at dawn, except during the winter months when the area is covered with fog. Varanasi has at least 84 ghats, most of which are

used for bathing by pilgrims and spiritually significant puja ceremonies, while a few are used exclusively as Vedic cremation sites.

The five most important ghats are *Pancanada, Manikarnika, Dasaswamedha, Asi* and *Varuna*. In *Sri Caitanya Caritamṛta Madhya-līla*, chapter 17, verse 82, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupada explains,

Finally, the Lord arrived with great happiness at the holy place called Kasi. There He took His bath in the bathing ghat known as Manikarnika. [Purport] Kasi is another name for Varanasi (Benares). It has been a place of pilgrimage since time immemorial. Two rivers named Asi and Varuna merge there. Manikarnika is famous because, according to the opinion of great personalities, a bejewelled earring fell there from the ear of Lord Visnu. According to some, it fell from the ear of Lord Śiva. The word mani means "jewel," and karnika means "from the ear." According to some, Lord Visvanatha is the great physician who cures the disease of material existence by delivering a person through the ear, which receives the vibration of the holy name of Lord Rama. Because of this, this holy place is called Manikarnika. It is said that there is no better place than where the river Ganges flows, and the bathing ghat known as Manikarnika is especially sanctified because it is very dear to Lord Visvanatha.

Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu discussed the deeper topics of Krishna consciousness with Sanātana Gosvami at the famous Dashashwamedh Ghat in Varanasi as described in *Sri Caitanya Caritamṛta Madhya-līla* chapter 20.

A morning boat ride on the Ganges across the ghats is a popular tourist attraction. The extensive stretches of ghats in Varanasi enhance the riverfront with a multitude of shrines, temples, and palaces built "tier on tier above the water's edge". Many of the ghats were constructed under the patronage of the Marathas, Scindias, Holkars, Bhonsles, and Peshwas. The ghats are best approached by Asi ghat and Dashashwamedh ghat, where boats are available on hire.

Every evening at sunset, spectacular Arati ceremonies are performed at various ghats of Varanasi, which is worthwhile to attend. Many pilgrims take part in the Arati ceremonies by getting on boats that take them to different ghats. The Ganges, which normally flows southeast, reverses its course and flows north for a while at Varanasi. According to Puranas, goddess Durga had thrown her sword after slaying the demon Shumbha–Nishumbha. The place where the sword had fallen resulted in a big stream known as the Asi river. Asi Ghat is located at the confluence of the rivers Ganges and Asi. There are references to Asi Ghat in *Matsya Purana, Agni Purana, Kurma Purana* and *Padma Purana*. Near Asi ghat, there is an ancient Lord Jagannatha temple.



Ganges River Front Ghats at Varanasi



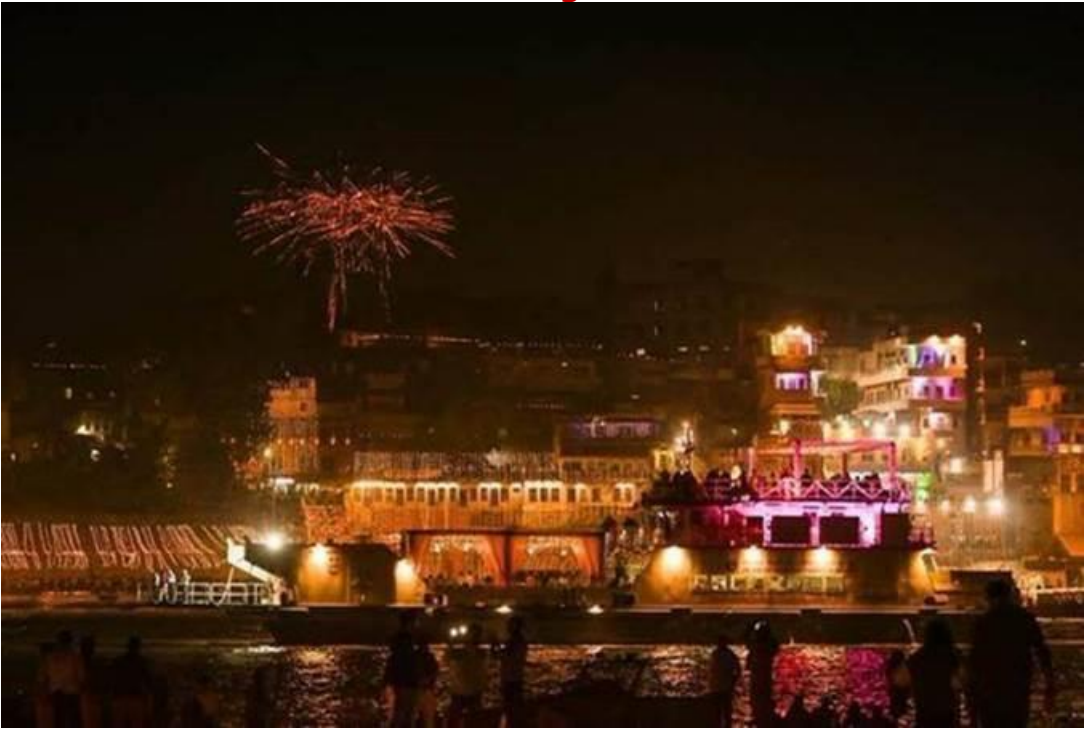
Ganges River Front Ghats



Spectacular Ganga Arati at Dashashwamedh Ghat is a hallmark and a lifetime experience to attend



Spectacular Dev Diwali celebrations at Ganges River Front Ghats on Karttik Purnima



Spectacular Dev Diwali celebrations at Ganges River Front Ghats



Spectacular Dev Diwali celebrations at Ganges River Front Ghats

Meeting of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Srila Sanatana Goswami at Varanasi



Lord Caitanya meeting Sanatana Gosvami at Varanasi

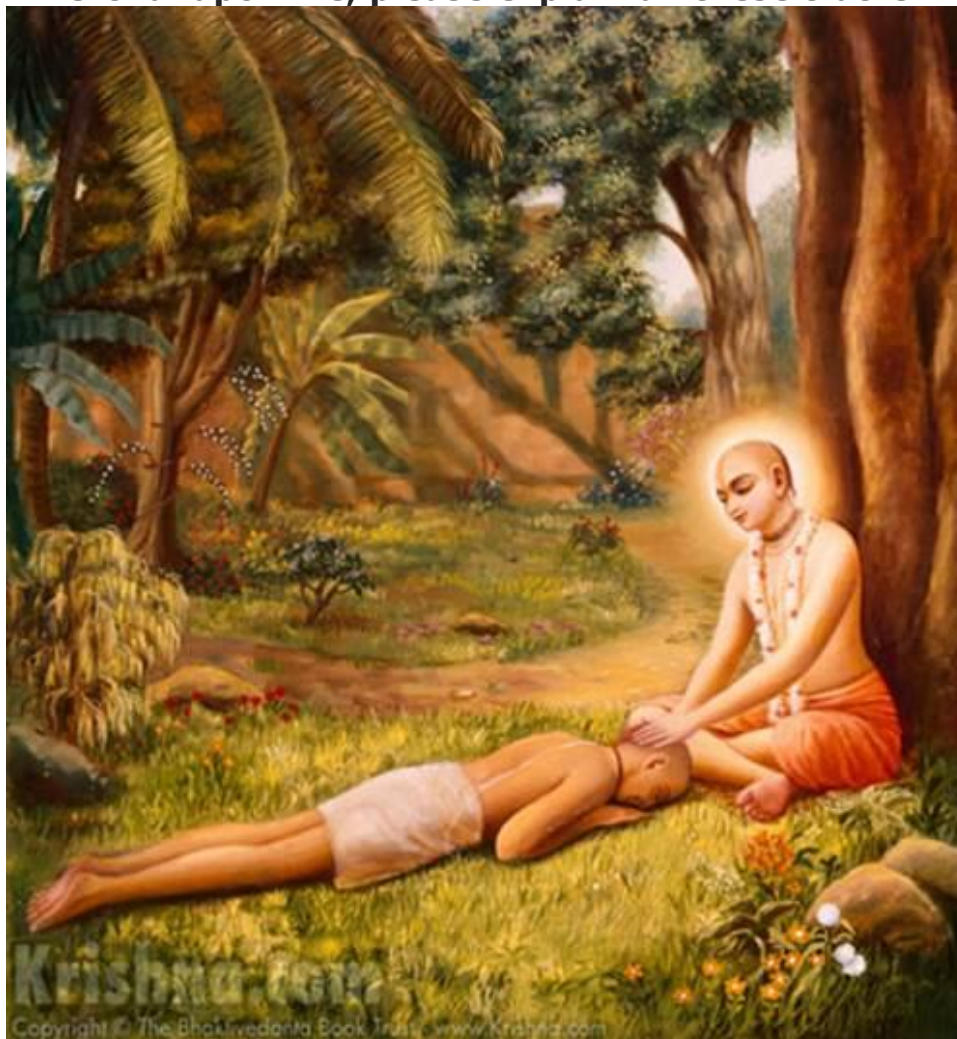
Sanatana Gosvami heard Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu had already visited Vrindavana and was residing at the house of Chandrasekhar. Sanatana sat outside of Chandrasekhar's house. Lord Caitanya told Chandrasekhar, "There is a very great, pure-hearted, Vaishnava outside. Please bring him in to Me."

Chandrasekhar went out and saw Sanatana. He went back and told the Lord, "There is no saintly Vaishnava out there." Lord asked, "Is there anyone at all at your door?" Chandrasekhara replied, "There is a Muslim mendicant." Lord immediately said, "Please bring him here." As soon as Lord Caitanya saw Sanatana, in great ecstasy He embraced him, bathing him with His tears of love.

Sanatana fell at the feet of Lord and said, "*Please, please do not touch me.*"

When Lord Caitanya began cleansing Sanatana's body with His own transcendental hand, Sanatana said, "O my Lord, please do not touch me. I am filthy and dirty. I am utterly fallen, sinful, and contaminated." The Lord replied, "I am touching you just to purify Myself, because by the force of your devotional service you can purify the whole universe. Saints of your calibre are themselves places of pilgrimage. Because of their purity, they are constant companions of the Lord, and therefore, they can purify even the places of pilgrimage. By seeing you, by touching you and by glorifying your transcendental qualities, one can perfect the purpose of all sense activity. This is the verdict of the revealed scriptures." Every day, in the mood of a beggar, he would go house to house, doing *madhukari*. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu was very pleased to see the spirit of renunciation of Sanatana Gosvami. Putting a straw in his mouth and bowing down, Sanatana Gosvami clasped the lotus feet of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and humbly spoke, "I was born in a low family, and my associates are all low-class men. I myself am fallen and am the lowest of men. Indeed, I have passed my

whole life fallen in the well of sinful materialism. Out of Your causeless mercy, You have delivered me from the materialistic path. Now, by the same causeless mercy, please tell me what my duty is. Who am I? Why do the threefold miseries always give me trouble? If I do not know this, how can I benefit? Actually, I do not know how to inquire about the goal of life and the process for obtaining it. Be merciful upon me, please explain all these truths."



Lord Caitanya blesses Sanatana Gosvami

Lord Caitanya then personally told Sanatana Gosvami very elaborately about Lord Krishna's real identity. How the living entity is one of Lord Krishna's energies.

Lord explained the way of devotional service. While discussing the Absolute Truth, Sri Krishna, the Lord analyzed Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan, as well as the expansions of the Lord called svayam-rupa, tad-ekatma and avesha, which are divided into various branches known as vaibhava and prabhava. Thus the Lord described the many forms of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He also described the incarnations of God within the material world. Srila Krsnadasa Kaviraj Gosvami has elaborately recorded this transcendental conversation in Sri Caitanya Caritamrta by dedicating five full chapters: Madhya lila chapter 20 verses 97-406, Madhya-lila chapter 21, 22, 23, 24 and Antya lila chapter 4 which describe the Science of the Absolute Truth, Opulence and Sweetness of Lord Sri Krishna, Process of Devotional Service, Life's Ultimate Goal, the Sixty-one Explanations of the Atmarama verse. Lord Caitanya then instructed Sanatana,

"Previously I empowered your brother Rupa Gosvami to understand these mellows while instructing him at Prayaga. You should broadcast the revealed scriptures in devotional service and excavate the lost places of pilgrimage in the district of Mathura. Establish devotional service to Lord Krishna and Radharani in Vrindavana. You should also compile bhakti scriptures and preach the bhakti cult from Vrindavana. What is the duty of a devotee? What is Vaishnava etiquette? What is the behaviour of one in the renounced order of life? From all the

scriptures you should understand that the essence of all knowledge is pure, unalloyed devotional service to Sri Sri Radha and Krishna."



Lord Caitanya and Srila Sanatana Gosvami with a straw in his mouth out of humility and bowed down

Lord Caitanya instructed Sri Sanatana Gosvami in all the conclusions of devotional service for two consecutive months. Sanatana said, "The conclusions that You have told me are the ocean of the ambrosia of truth. My mind is unable to approach even a drop of that ocean. If You want to make a lame man like me dance, kindly bestow Your transcendental blessings by placing Your lotus feet on my head." Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu blessed Sanatana, placing His hand on his head. Thus, Sanatana received the power to describe these subjects in books like Hari-bhakti-vilasa. Lord Caitanya told Sanatana Gosvami that He was entrusting him with this mission, and to fulfil it, he should go to Vrindavana.

6. ISKCON Varanasi

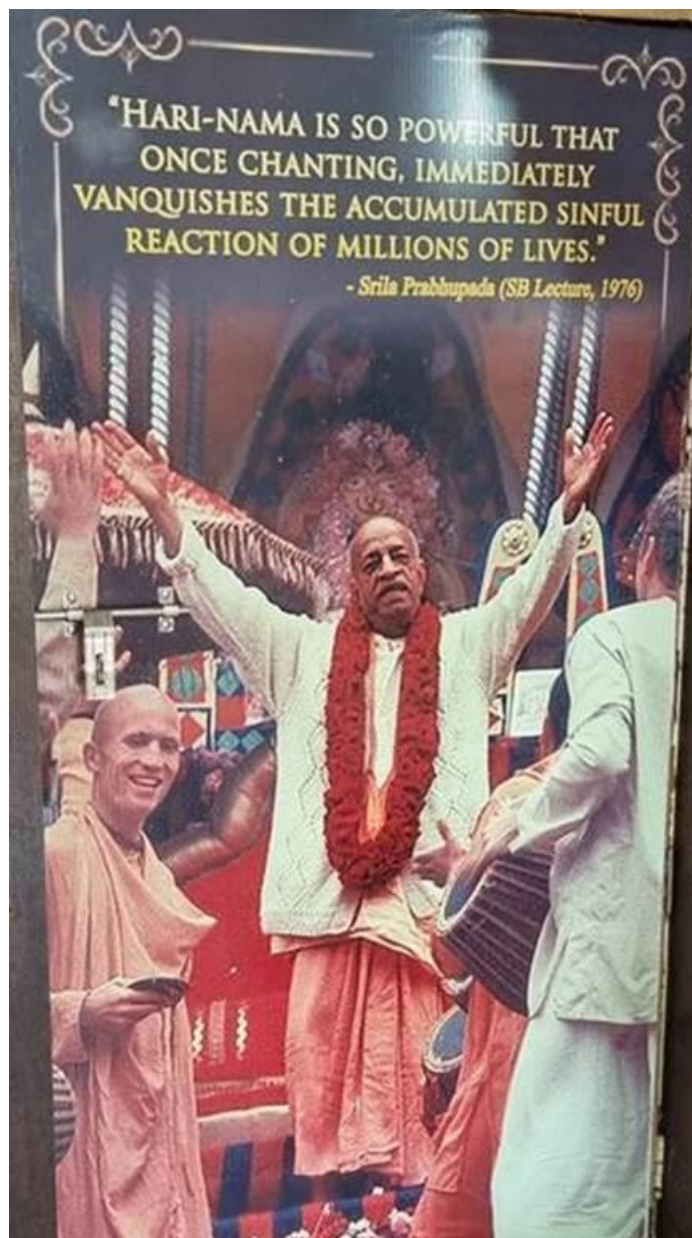
International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) has a temple in Varanasi. Their Lordships Sri Sri Radha Gopal Ji are the presiding deities. The temple is close to the main city area. Currently, a new temple is being constructed on the same premises. Address: B 27/80 Durgakund Road Near ICICI Bank ATM, Anandbagh, Bhelupur, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh 221010



Their Lordships Sri Sri Radha Gopal Ji, the presiding deities at ISKCON Varanasi



A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder-acarya of International Society for Krishna Consciousness



Srila Prabhupada on the power of Harinama Sankirtana

7. ISKCON Preaching Centre at BHU

Banaras Hindu University (BHU) is one of the most prestigious and respected universities in India. ISKCON devotees actively participate in the Krishna Conscious preaching programs at BHU. Many ISKCON sannyasis and senior devotees regularly dedicate their time and efforts to conduct seminars and Youth preaching programs at BHU to uplift society to take up the eternal, all-beneficial process of Krishna Consciousness. The outcomes have been very positive. Inside Banaras Hindu University campus, there is also a newly constructed Vishwanath temple. This temple was planned by Pandit Malviya and built by the Birla family. Its inner and outer structure is built in resemblance to the original Kashi Vishwananth temple which was demolished by Aurangzeb.



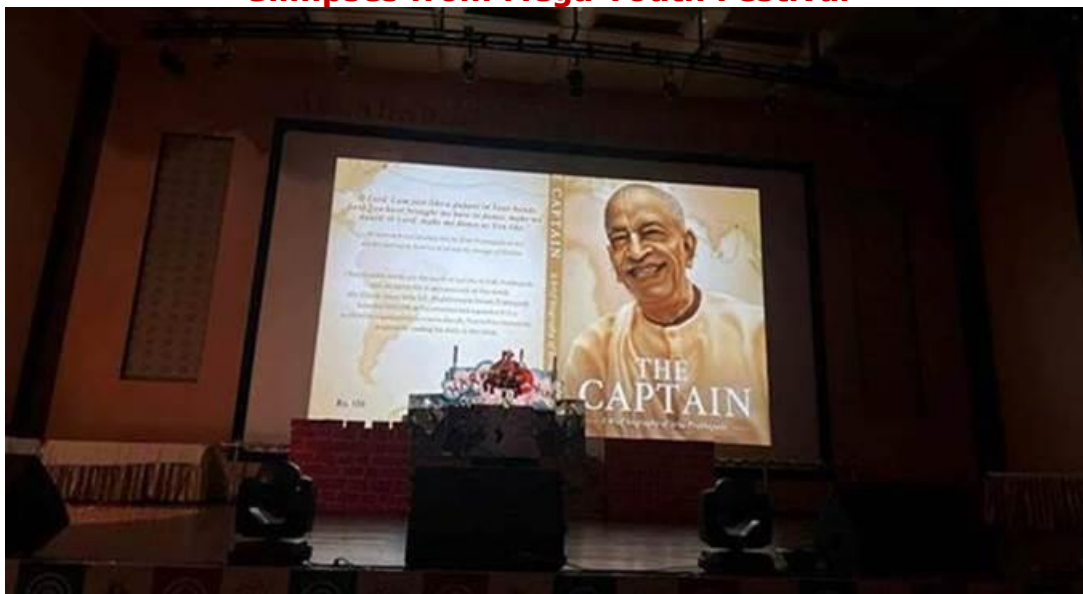
Mega Youth Festival



Mega Youth Festival at Varanasi



Glimpses from Mega Youth Festival



Mega Youth Festival



Kashi Vishwanath temple at Banaras Hindu University (BHU)

8. Sri Sankat Mochan Temple

The famous Sri Sankat Mochan temple is located near Asi Ghat. It is dedicated to Hanuman Ji, the eternal servitor of Lord Ramacandra. The temple is large. The orange coloured deity of Hanuman covered with vermillion is very charming. Inside the temple there are various bhoga offering stalls where one can buy Hanuman Ji's favourite sweets ladoos to offer.



Sri Sankat Mochan Temple

9. Sarnath

Lord Buddha came to Sarnath, which is 13 km from Varanasi. After attaining enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, Buddha came to Sarnath. He delivered his first sermon here and set in motion the wheel of law. Sarnath has many exquisitely beautiful gardens and Stupas (pagoda). Buddhism spread throughout India and other parts of the world when Emperor Ashoka came into power. Here, in Sarnath, the emperor established a marvellous image of four lions facing four directions joined together with the wheel of dharma. This statue became the national symbol of India.



Sarnath



Magnificent Gardens at Sarnath



Magnificent Gardens at Sarnath



Stupas (pagoda) at Sarnath

Useful Resources:

Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu Instructs Sanatana Gosvami in the Science of the Absolute Truth:

<https://vedabase.io/en/library/cc/madhya/20/>

How All the Residents of Varanasi Became Vaisnavas:

<https://vedabase.io/en/library/cc/adi/7/40/> and <https://vedabase.io/en/library/cc/madhya/25/>
(Caitanya Caritamrta Adi-lila chapter 7.40 to 161 and Madhya-lila chapter 25)

ISKCON Varanasi: <https://iskconvaranasi.org/>
<https://www.facebook.com/ISKCONVaranasiOfficial/>
Youth preaching: <https://samskara.org.in/>

Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu in Varanasi lectures:

https://audio.iskcondesiretree.com/02_-_ISKCON_Swamis/ISKCON_Swamis_-_R_to_Y/His_Holiness_Radhanath_Swami/Lectures/00_-_Year_wise/Devotional_Nectar_-_1995/1995-043_Lord_Chaitanya_In_Varanasi_HT_-_Lecture_Mumbai_-_Radhanath_Swami_1995-02-05.mp3 (by HH Radhanath Swami)

https://audio.iskcondesiretree.com/02_-_ISKCON_Swamis/ISKCON_Swamis_-_A_to_C/His_Holiness_Bhakti_Rasamrita_Swami/English_Lectures/Various/BRasamritaSw_Various_-_Chaitanya_Mahaprabhu_in_Varanasi.mp4.mp3 (by HH Bhakti Rasamrita Swami)

Paundraka, the False Vasudeva: <https://vedabase.io/en/library/sb/10/66/>

Mayapur TV: <http://Mayapur.tv> / **Vrindavana TV:** <http://Vrindavan.tv>

Holy Pilgrimages – Journey to Holy Dhamas: www.Holy-Pilgrimages.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/HolyPilgrimages

Holy Dham: www.HolyDham.com

**Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare |
Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare ||**